Malta’s level of preparedness to deal with coastal oil pollution

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Contents

- Social, economic and environmental importance of Malta’s coastal environment
- Malta’s exposure to oil pollution risks
- Potential Impact of oil pollution
- Audit objectives
- Audit methodology
- Audit risks and limitations
- Preliminary findings, and
- The way forward
Importance of Malta’s coastal environment

- Economic activities in Malta’s territorial waters and contiguous zone total around 16% of GDP:
  - Direct extraction of resources from the sea – fishing and fish-farming, the production of potable water from seawater and the extraction of salt and mineral products
  - Services related to the marine environment and products – tourism, marine transportation including trans-shipment and yachting activities, processing of products derived from the sea
  - Investment and infrastructural activities – construction of infrastructural systems as well as research and development activities in the marine field
Importance of Malta’s coastal environment

- The conservation and safeguarding of the marine environment is critical to Malta’s economic and social well being

- Malta’s marine environment is considered to be a precious common heritage that must be protected, preserved and where possible restored to maintain a healthy and productive ecosystem, thus ensuring an everlasting resource to mankind – 6 areas totalling 191 square kilometres have been declared as marine protected areas

- An important element to Malta’s coastal management relates to the island’s preparedness to mitigate and deal with oil pollution risks
Malta’s exposure to oil pollution risks

- Malta’s territorial waters and contiguous zone are subject to various pollution threats, namely from shipping, fishing and waste waters.

- Other potential threats include those related to oil exploration activities.

- The State of Environment Report (2010) identifies the activity related to shipping as one of the major pressure on the Maltese waters.

- Oil exploration activity taking place in nearby countries as well as the potential oil exploration in Malta, are increasing the pressure on Malta’s marine resource and the island’s coast.
Vessel volume within 10 nautical miles of the Maltese coast
Gas and oil activity in Tunisia and Libya
Transport paths of pollutants from different source positions

This cumulative picture combines the effects of different meteo-marine conditions on the sea surface flow field.

They provide information on the most frequent 2D currents and can thus be used to assess the most probable pathways that oil pollution floating at sea would be expected to follow.
Oil spill density in the area surrounding Malta
Potential impact of oil pollution

The main effects of accidental oil spillage may lead to:

- health problems
- serious impact on the smothering of marine flora and fauna
- alternation of the physical and chemical characteristics of habitats
- decrease in drinking water supply
- fishing activity will have to be suspended for a period of time
- persistence of oil for decades on some shorelines
Audit Objectives

This performance audit seeks to determine the extent to which Malta is prepared to deal with oil pollution through evaluating the extent to which:

- comprehensive assessments have been undertaken to identify oil pollution threats to the Maltese coast
- mechanisms to alert authorities as soon as an oil spill is detected are in place
- adequate contingency plans are drafted
- Procedures are in place to determine liability in accordance with the polluter pays principle
- recovery plans are available to restore affected waters on the basis of socio-economic and environment terms to their original state in the shortest possible time
Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with stakeholders</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse delegation of responsibilities</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse relative documentation</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse trends</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate communication channels</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse simulation exercises</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate extent of determining liability</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculate costs</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconcile equipment inventory and maintenance logs</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of agreements with third parties</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Audit Limitations

- Outdated statistics
- Limitations in oil pollution data
- Multiple players and cross-cutting initiatives
- Minimal costings information
- Undocumented policies and procedures
- Policy gaps (national and supranational)
- Complex legal and operational frameworks
- Trans-boundary issues
- Audit team expertise in operational issues
Preliminary Findings

Objective 1 – Risk and vulnerability assessments

- RVAs limited to threats up to 4 nm from the Maltese coast
- Studies do not consider risks from oil exploration and exploitation
- RVAs compiled in 2009 have not been updated
- Further in-depth studies recommended have not yet been undertaken
Preliminary Findings

Objective 2 – Detection

- Satellite imaging not received daily
- Imaging of only major zones are analysed regularly
- Heavy dependence on operators to report spillages
- Significant reliance on airlines and ships to report oil spills
- Unverified reports of oil spills
- Air and sea surveillance by responsible entities do not specifically target oil spill detection
Preliminary Findings

Objective 3 – Contingency planning and response

- Plan is to be officially approved by Parliament
- Responsibilities in zones beyond the territorial waters are not defined
- Some players are disputing parts of the contingency plan
- Contingency addresses only land-based and ships related oil-spills
- Uncertainty over the use of dispersants
- Unclear location and status of oil-spill recovery equipment
- Bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements are in the process of being updated
- Training limitations
- A specific budget to deal with oil pollution is not designated
Preliminary Findings

Objective 4 – Liability

- There are a significant number of unknown sources and/or unspecified volumes of oil spills
- Complex legal procedures

Objective 5 – Recovery of Zones

- There is a lack of base-line information relating to the environmental status of various zones
- There are no strategies and plans in place to designate responsibilities and priorities for the restoration of zones
The Way Forward

- Continuation of fieldwork
- Reporting in early 2014
- Various recommendations will be proposed and communicated to players and stakeholders
- Keeping abreast of on-going developments in the legislative and operational frameworks
Thank you

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